

Plymouth Student's Shot at Space!

[Plymouth University's Space Society](#) is planning to send a small shot glass 'into space' attached to a weather balloon in the coming week.

The aim is to send the glass 100,000 feet above the Earth, equivalent to 30 kilometres, and then bring it back safely. On its return, in true student fashion, they intend to use the glass to drink a few 'space cocktails'!

The idea for launching the weather balloon began last summer when Fraser Searle and Nick Hardacre, who lead the Space Society at Plymouth University, were looking for ways to create interest in space in the local community. They originally hoped to send a bottle of local gin up, but soon found the challenges of working in a sub zero environment. It would have taken a balloon one and half times the size of the current one and double the volume of helium, so they changed to the shot glass.

They'll also be attaching cameras and tracking equipment to the six metre diameter balloon to record and monitor the journey. The students have a roller coaster of emotions at the moment as Fraser explained, "We're feeling excited, but I do get waves of nerves as to whether the glass and the cameras will return unharmed. We're also wondering if the pictures and videos will be clear."

Technically, the weather balloon won't get into space. It should reach the upper half of the stratosphere, an area known as near space. As this area stretches from 20km to 100km above the Earth, 'near' is a relative term.

Pixalytics got involved with the project before Christmas, when we helped with sponsorship to enable the students to finish purchasing the necessary equipment. We're also hoping to provide support in reviewing and interpreting the images the cameras collect on the journey. It'll be interesting to compare what the weather balloon sees, with what various satellite imagery shows.

We're strong supporters of events that encourage students and early career scientists to enhance their understanding of remote sensing, space and science. We sponsor student conferences and prizes that take place in the UK. So, it's fantastic to get involved in something much closer to home.

Launching a weather balloon requires permission from the Civil Aviation Authority, and is also highly weather dependent. A planned launch at the end of January had to be abandoned as the balloon was likely to end up in Portsmouth or Calais harbour.

However, the team have once again got the relevant permissions to try again this coming week. The exact launch date will depend on the wind and weather patterns around Plymouth, which are always fairly turbulent. Fraser said, "We'll be glued to the online predictors to find a launch slot."

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This is great local project for Plymouth, and we're pleased to be able to support it. We have our fingers crossed for suitable weather, but only time will tell if they manage to conquer space!

